

# **BOTSWANA 2013 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT**

## **Executive Summary**

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Ambassador hosted a meeting with religious leaders representing each of the major faiths present in the country. The Ambassador also hosted a digital video conference between the same group of religious leaders and a U.S. interfaith organization to guide the local religious leaders in forming their own interfaith group.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the total population is 2.1 million (July 2013 estimate). Approximately 70 percent of citizens are members of Christian groups, 6 percent are adherents of the traditional indigenous religion Badimo, and 1 percent belong to other religious groups. Approximately 20 percent espouse no religion.

Anglicans, Methodists, and members of the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa make up the majority of Christians. There are also Lutherans, Roman Catholics, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Baptists, members of the Dutch Reformed Church, Mennonites, and members of other Christian denominations. According to a 2011 study by the Pew Research Center, there are approximately 8,000 Muslims, many of whom are of South Asian origin. There are small numbers of Hindus and Bahais. Immigrants, including foreign workers, are more likely to be members of non-Christian religious groups than are native-born citizens.

## **Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom**

### **Legal/Policy Framework**

The constitution and other laws and policies generally protect religious freedom.

## **BOTSWANA**

The constitution permits the government to suspend religious freedom in the interest of national defense, public safety, public order, public morality, or public health when the suspension is deemed “reasonably justifiable in a democratic society,” but it has never done so.

All organizations, including religious groups, must register with the government. To register, a group must submit its constitution to the registrar of societies section of the Ministry of Labor and Home Affairs. A group must register to conduct business, sign contracts, or open an account at a local bank. Any person who manages, assists in the management of, or holds an official position in an unregistered group is subject to a fine of up to 1,000 pula (BWP) (\$114) and up to seven years in prison. Any member of an unregistered group is subject to penalties including fines up to BWP 500 (\$57) and up to three years in prison.

Optional religious education is part of the curriculum in public schools; it emphasizes Christianity but also addresses other religious groups in the country. There are private Christian and Muslim schools, and the constitution provides that every religious group may establish places for religious instruction at the group’s expense. The government regulates all private schools and does not distinguish between religious and non-religious schools. The constitution prohibits forced religious instruction, forced participation in religious ceremonies, and taking oaths that run counter to an individual’s religious beliefs.

### **Government Practices**

Although it was common for government meetings to begin with a Christian prayer, members of non-Christian groups also occasionally led prayers.

### **Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom**

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

### **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy**

The Ambassador hosted a meeting with religious leaders representing each of the major faiths present in the country to discuss interfaith collaboration. The Ambassador hosted a digital video conference between the same group of religious

## **BOTSWANA**

leaders and a U.S. interfaith organization to guide the local religious leaders in forming their own interfaith group.